



A farewell to the lone hero researcher: team research and writing

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Abstract

Criminology have long celebrated the lone hero researcher. Doing and writing up research in solitude has been the key to academic success and institutional promotions. However, the social sciences in general have increasingly moved towards more collaborative ways of doing research, and co-authorship has become more common. In this study, we summarize and discuss the pros and cons of working in teams when doing qualitative research. Drawing upon our own experiences from Mexico and Norway, we argue for a radical approach to team research and co-authorship, which we describe as team writing. Most importantly, we suggest opening up to include stakeholders and community partners, thus challenging the borders between researchers and those researched. This is arguably particularly important for research done in the academic, geographical and topical periphery of criminology. Team research and writing answers some of the critique of power inequality, representativity and lack of diversity in contemporary academic research. We also believe that team research, and writing, can make criminological research more multifaceted, reflexive, and thus better.

Introduction

The academic field comes with both prestige and power, but also a constant struggle to achieve them (Bourdieu, 2008). Getting citations and publications in recognized journals or with prestigious publishers is an important part of this. However,

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establishing a reputation as good researchers, regardless of publication channels and citations is also crucial. In the social sciences, one of the main criteria for achieving success has been sole-author publications, and one of the most attractive social identities is *the lone hero researcher*. Authors' names become a brand in what can be described as 'academic capitalism' (Bain & Payne, 2016), selling books and papers, but also an idea of the genius individual. While there are good reasons to celebrate exceptional individuals, one can question the underlying notion that ideas are produced in solitary reflection and that scholarship is essentially driven by individual brilliance.

Team research and co-authorship, or team writing, can be a prolific alternative to the lone hero researcher. These forms of doing research have become increasingly common in criminology and include well-established forms of collaboration in academia, with colleagues, PhD students, and research assistants; but can also include stakeholders and community partners who are not necessarily scholars. The latter is uncommon in criminology, but has elsewhere variably been described as collaborative research (Rappaport, 2008), co-investigation (Porter, 2016), co-produced research (Kara, 2017), co-labour (Leyva & Speed, 2008), and inclusive research (Milner & Frawley, 2019). These approaches rely less on the ideas of exceptional individuals and more on research being a collaborative effort, sometimes also including people who are part of, or have a stake in the research field. Such approaches can arguably empower social actors, challenge the borders between scholars and research subjects, and question the alienating distinctions between academic and other forms of knowledge. Issues such as positionality, power imbalance, and questions about dissemination and ownership have been debated widely in methodological and colonialism literature (Alonso et al., 2018; Leyva et al., 2018; Spivak, 1988). This is a valuable and pertinent criticism; however, it does not always come with constructive alternatives. Team research and writing can be one such alternative, and we argue that it should be included in the methodological repertoire of qualitative research in criminology.

In this study, we lay out the pros and cons of team research and team writing. We draw on experiences from two team research projects, of which we have been part, and integrate insights from these projects into the discussion. The topics and concepts on which each of us worked are quite different. The research contexts, Mexico and Norway, are also poles apart and the projects emerged from respectively sociology of law and criminology. Through numerous conversations, we found that despite these differences, our experiences of team research and writing had much in common. Importantly, our purpose with this paper is not to dismiss individualistic or other established approaches in criminology. We have published most of our own previous research as sole authors, or with academic colleagues, and will probably continue to do so in the future. Rather, we want to invite qualitative criminologists to an open debate on with whom to do research and who to include as authors on academic publications.

The lone hero researcher vs collaborative research

What we describe (somewhat humorously) as the lone hero researcher draws on two distinct ideal types of academics. These emerge from two competing epistemological ideas of the foundation of knowledge, but advocate the same individualistic approach to research and authorship, that can be contrasted with more collaborative research efforts.

The empiricist, theorist, and author

The ideal of the lone *academic empiricist* goes back to Aristotle and emphasizes experience as the basic form of knowledge (Jong & Betti, 2010). These are researchers who go seemingly ‘unaided’ out in the world, collect data, and come up with new descriptions and perspectives based on their personal observations. Arguably, this is one of the two research ideals that have come to dominate in the social sciences. Anthropology serves as a good example for qualitative research. They have a long history of lone researchers entering an unfamiliar community and allegedly revealing the truth about it for a small academic community on the outside. These researchers often claim to have deciphered a complicated world and to have come out with superior knowledge through individual engagement, experiences, interviews, and fieldwork. In criminology, the tradition of ethnographic studies of street culture (e.g. Andersson, 2000, Bourgois, 2003), is particularly close to this research ideal. Going back to Whyte’s (1943) *Street Corner Society*, this has become a highly popular and respected genre, which has fostered and advanced the career of some of the most renowned contemporary criminologists.

The other research ideal, the *academic theorist*, can be traced back to Descartes’ conception of science as based on a lone, self-sufficient individual guided by reason (Burk, 2007; Code, 1991). Outside the researcher, there is an object to be known and appropriated by that process of knowing. Theorists are usually associated more with the humanities than the social sciences. Especially in philosophy, a long line of scholars are often portrayed as the exceptional few, and long traditions of thinking are often known in their names. In qualitative research in criminology, it is found in researchers who prioritise theory development, and use data primarily as illustrations (e.g. Becker, 1963; Cressey, 1953; Katz, 1988). These two ideal types are combined in research in various ways and underlie much academic production of knowledge in the discipline.

Interestingly, the legal notion of the *author* (including both the *empiricist* and the *theorist*) was built upon similar principles of individuality and fronts a particular view of knowledge. In the nineteenth century, Foucault (1998) would later describe it as the history of ideas taking an individualist turn, copyright and author’s rights were built from the assertion of literary geniuses as exceptional individuals (Woodmansee, 1994). In the social sciences, this legal notion of the author can be seen in a series of excellent, but heavily-romanticized scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Erving Goffman, Talcott Parsons, Jürgen Habermas, and Niklas Luhmann. In criminology, names that come up include Edwin Sutherland, John

Braithwaite, David Garland to mention a random few (usually white Western men, see e.g. Moosavi, 2019). Foucault (1998: 329) himself, however, described how such names are based on an ‘author function’, which is closely tied to particular legal and institutional historical systems and pointed out that it ‘does not operate in a uniform manner in all discourses, at all times, and in any given culture’. Following this, we believe that, since what is considered authorship and the role it is given in academia are in flux, it should be accompanied by continuous and reflexive discussions about its uses, boundaries and potentials.

Collaboration and power imbalances

We define team research as the process of gathering and systematizing information that involves more than one person at different stages—in short, everything that falls outside the ideal of the lone hero *empiricist* researcher. We further define team writing as the process of writing text that requires the involvement and agreement of more than one person considered by each other as co-authors. Importantly, team research does not demand, nor does it always result in team writing and co-authorship. Although we use both the terms, we prefer team writing to co-authorship (which is more common), because we believe that texts that come from collaboration represent something more than the individual authors’ contributions. It is the product of a team-writing *process*. While co-authorship refers mainly to an explicit recognition of a contribution, the concept of team writing highlights the process of discussion, negotiation and compromises that is at the core of collaborative writing.

There is nothing new in doing or writing up research in teams (see e.g. Endersby, 1996; Guest & MacQueen, 2008). In areas like physics or health science, papers are usually authored by several persons (Mallapaty, 2018). In social sciences, including criminology, co-authorship has increased significantly as part of a development where solo-authored books have given way to multi-authored journal articles as the standard form of publishing (Copes et al., 2020; Roche et al., 2019). The reasons for this may include the emergence of modern communication technology, increasing pressures to publish, more specialized subfields, and more sophisticated methods of data analysis (Roche et al., 2019). Nonetheless, sole-authored publications are still a prerequisite for tenure and promotion, probably leading to a tension in the field (Lemke et al., 2015). Yet there has been relatively little reflection on these changes in criminology.

Arguably, collaboration makes it easier to get more data and have more perspectives on interpretation and analysis; it can also be more inspiring and less lonely than other forms of doing social scientific research (Copes & Vieraitis, 2020; Zutshi et al., 2012). When working with colleagues in academia, researchers can pool resources, inspire each other, and, this way, do better research. Dilemmas can arise around who should take the final decisions regarding what directions should the research take. Many researchers are busy and have several projects running simultaneously. Thus, it can be difficult to find the time and decide who should do what. In practice, therefore, one researcher is often in charge and runs the project, getting assistance from others, whenever necessary.

These research teams can involve PhD students, research assistants, or several senior scholars. All combinations come with particular dilemmas and particular advantages. The teams that do research together also co-author texts at times, while at other times, outsiders are invited in for co-authorship, for example, to get a particular theoretical expertise or perspective on data.

In criminology, research is often done on symbolically, socially, and economically marginalized—and sometimes exoticized—‘others’. While this has been challenged by perspectives such as zemiology (Hillyard & Tombs, 2017), environmental harm (White, 2013) and state crime (Green & Ward, 2017), researching ‘the other’ still dominates the discipline. Moreover, the people involved, also in these more critical perspectives, are usually seen as objects of research rather than as active participants – although the word participant is often used and person-first language has been increasingly common (e.g. now a requirement in the journal *Criminology*). Leyva et al.’s (2018) argument that participants’ experiences occupy the position of raw matter that is to be transformed by scholars into a refined product of research, in which those people are not expected to participate, seems to fit criminological scholarship well. These processes of objectivation of knowledge leave them with little agency. Collaborative, inclusive, or co-produced research involving stakeholders and community partners challenge this separation between researchers and participants.

Concerns about power imbalances have led to more activist forms of research (Kara, 2017: 291–92) particularly for feminist and decolonial research, but also for research on indigenous peoples, people with physical disabilities and people with mental health problems. Thus, Rappaport (2008: 4–5) emphasizes that collaborative research should also include co-conceptualization and co-theoretization: ‘the collective production of conceptual vehicles that draw upon both a body of anthropological theory and upon concepts developed by our interlocutors’. Porter (2016: 294) similarly emphasizes that the aim should be to move ‘from the participation and dialogue which characterises co-production of knowledge, to co-investigation where such partners are actively engaged in the research process, as peer-researchers’. Similarly, inclusive research has been the favoured term in disability research—a term that includes all approaches with a democratizing orientation challenging established power-knowledge structures and emphasizing the expertise and agency of agents in the social field under study (Milner & Frawley, 2019: 383). In Latin America, anthropology in particular has followed a decolonial perspective toward collaboration (see e.g. Levya et al., 2018; Hernández & Terven, 2017).

Regardless of the terms used, new ways to include and engage participants in research has expanded in several disciplines and fields of study. Qualitative researchers have been in the forefront of these developments, but with the noticeable exception of convict criminology (see e.g. Ross et al., 2016; Earle, 2016), qualitative criminologists have been lagging behind (Dupont, 2008). The main aim of such collaborative efforts has been to democratize research, thus empowering marginalized voices; but it has also been argued that the research itself can gain from it. Sinha and Back’s (2014) work on sociable methods in the studies of immigrants in the UK, for example, shows that research gains from having participants partake in decisions regarding what methods can be used and where, and the objectives of the research.

Many of these ideals are most famously seen in Participatory Action Research (PAR). This tradition that has been present in the social sciences since the 1940's and is characterised by participants working closely together with "professional researcher throughout the research process, from the initial design to the final presentation of the results and discussion of their action implications" (Whyte et al., 1991; see also McIntyre, 2007; Kemmis et al., 2014). The research is typically action oriented focusing on the needs of a particular group where the goal is to create better practices, organize participants and solve problems by collaboration. In Norway, Thomas Mathiesen (1971) fronted PAR in his work with prisoners. In Latin America, it became a prolific tradition from the 1970's, to great extent thanks to the work of Orlando Fals Borda (2009; Robles & Rappaport, 2018). Despite the emphasis on collaboration and although the voices of social actors are incorporated in exemplary ways, very few academic publications from PAR are co-authored with participants. Among all the collaborative goals fronted in this tradition, team writing does not seem to have been one of them. Also, and somehow paradoxically, PAR seems to be associated historically with a few 'hero' researchers in the same way as most other academic research traditions.

Some researchers have criticized or presented important nuances to these sometimes overly-romanticized portrayals of collaborative research in PAR and associated research traditions. Kara (2017), for example, describes the trouble she ran into during a co-produced, activist research after getting into a conflict with one of the participants. As Bain and Payne (2016) point out, it can also be problematic to assign all voices the same importance or giving central actors in the field veto over the research. They also describe how both the publication process and incentive to publish were different for those involved when writing up research. For many participants, 'having a publication' is 'not a form of currency relevant to their employment or life situations' (Bain & Payne, 2016: 334). Collaborative research has several other similar problems.

Nonetheless, through interviews and fieldwork, qualitative criminologists' empirical work entails working with people outside academia. Through methodologies such as workshops, auto-ethnographies, and biographical narration, social actors can be part of producing qualitative data in ways that also aid its analysis. Increasingly, qualitative research has been conducted in groups (Copes & Vieraitis, 2020; Copes et al., 2020). While doing research with academic colleagues or hiring assistants (often students) is a widely-accepted form of team research, the inclusion of stakeholders and community partners is often viewed more sceptically. It can be understood as challenging the well-established scientific ideals of objectivity and neutrality, and blurring the distinction between researchers and those being researched.

Diversifying and democratizing academia: Two case studies

To inform this discussion of the pros and cons of team research and writing, we will present some experiences and insights from our own research projects. We focus on two research projects that involved team research and writing. The first was a study of young Muslims in Norway which included an ethnically and religiously diverse

group of research assistants. The second was an oral history project in Mexico that included social movements and indigenous peoples as community partners. Experiences from these two projects and the qualitative methodological literature will be the starting points for the discussion of team research and writing. We will particularly emphasize team writing and co-authorship since this has received scarce attention in the qualitative methods literature so far.

Collaborative research on Islam in Norway

Sveinung Sandberg organized a large study of young Muslims in Norway and views of religious extremism, embedded within criminology (e.g. Sandberg & Colvin, 2020; Mohamed & Sandberg, 2019; Sandberg & Andersen, 2019). Research assistants were recently graduated master's students from different academic disciplines with expertise in Islam. Some also had cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds that gave them a certain stake in the research field. The research design was made possible by a large research grant that allowed assistants to be hired for one and a half years. As we mentioned, working with or hiring research assistants is a widespread way of collaboration or team research in academia. Assistants can participate in anything from collection of documents, literature searches, coding when data are very extensive, and even fieldwork, but often help out with interviews and transcription. Having assistants, for example, makes it possible to increase the number of interviews from 20–30 to several hundreds. However, as common as it is to have research assistants, they are often seen as simply aiding the project leader practically and excluded from recognition of scholarly contribution in design and development of projects and project ideas. In Sveinung's project, he tried to do this a little differently.

The first week of the research project was set off for collaboration to make an interview guide. Although Sveinung had some initial ideas, the first week was used to determine more precise research questions. In the next four weeks, the team did trial interviews and held meetings several times a week, listening to interviews together and discussing everything from the interview guide and interview style to possible new research ideas and research questions. Later, the research group continued having weekly meetings where they listened to the interview recordings or read the transcripts and discussed possible interpretations and implications of themes from the interviews. Researchers and research assistants' genuine commitment and interest in the research conducted is pivotal to obtaining good qualitative data. As the research assistants were included from the start, they became more involved and engaged, thus obtaining better data than if they had just been handed a pre-organized research design by the project leader. This way, the project also got more out of the resources in the group. The research assistants had extensive knowledge of Islam from different perspectives. Some were stakeholders, and this proved to be an invaluable resource in all phases of the project.

The research team decided to co-author a book wrapping up the project (Sandberg et al., 2018). The book had seven authors, which is rather unprecedented in qualitative research; a fact that shows how often the work of research assistants goes

unrecognised (sometimes appearing only in the *acknowledgments* section). Instead of writing separate chapters and putting them together in an edited volume, the book was written in one voice, representing the research team as a group. The writing process was organized such that each author got the responsibility for writing a first draft chapter on a topic of their particular interest. Subsequently, this draft was sent around in the group for the others to edit and add text. Initially, the intention was for everyone to write on all chapters, but the writing process ended up being organized in such a way that Sveinung took the main responsibility for coherence of the argument and the final text. The outcomes of the project also included a social media project, with videos of young Muslims explaining their religious beliefs (they can be found under the name *MuslimVoices* on both Facebook and YouTube). This was done on the initiative of some of the research assistants who wanted the project to have some impact beyond academia and to reach ‘those who do not read books’.

Doing research in groups has many challenges. Conflicts can appear, and researchers can have different ways to work and different aims and goals. This project was no exception. There were many intense discussions and different opinions on how to conduct and interpret the results. These discussions were mostly fruitful and meant that everyone had to think twice (or ten times) over ways to ask questions, approach participants, or initial ideas for analysis. Sometimes, these discussions also led to conflicts in the group. Researchers in the team had different associations to Islam, from assistants being Muslims, having a Muslim cultural background, ethnic minority background, or having an academic interest in a particular dimension of Islam. Interests in the group also varied from personal engagement in the religion, to interest in ‘everyday Islam’ (Ammerman, 2006), to a particular interest in radicalization and extremism. Most teams doing qualitative research will have to engage with differences and conflicts. Sometimes, personal and academic interests can also be difficult to separate. However, when researchers study topics in which they are personally engaged (such as religion, and especially its connection to extremism), discussions and engagement can be more intense than in other projects.

While collaborating during the interview, coding and initial analysis demanded extensive organizing and led to some heated discussions, it was not until the team started writing together that the challenges of working as a group really came to the fore. The initial idea was that everyone should participate in writing everything, but after a couple of rounds of sending texts around, it turned out that this was both inefficient and frustrating, and made the text less coherent and readable. There were too many agendas, writing styles, and ideas. Some of the co-authors also had little experience in academic writing. It was, therefore, decided that the text drafts should be sent to Sveinung who assumed the overall responsibility for the text. However, all the authors read and commented on all parts of the book, which inspired interesting discussions and difficult compromises. Having one person in charge solved the problem of producing the text, but it cemented the inherent power imbalance in the project to some extent. Sveinung got the last word on the text, although everything (particular phrases, choice of data presented, interpretations, etc.) had to be accepted by everyone involved. In the end, the kind of job the seven authors did varied a lot. Some contributed more to data collection and organizing; some to coding, commenting, and literature searches; and others did more of the writing. Crediting

everyone as authors reflected how everyone had actively participated in the shaping of the research and contributed to the results in different ways.

Many team research projects involving research assistants and students, including the ones Sveinung has been involved in before, tend to have the senior researcher as the main organizer and ultimate expert on the research topic and the entire research process. Results are also often published by the lead researcher alone or with other senior colleagues, and the role of assistants is mainly to ‘collect’ data. This can be seen as a version of the lone hero researcher in team research, with the project leader responsible for everything from research questions to interview guide and writing. However, in this case, the participants had a lot of experience and a stake in their respective research fields. They knew better than Sveinung the basic concepts of Islam, role of Islam in society, and how Islam is practised among young people. They also had superior language and cultural knowledge, and experiences of living as ethnic minorities and Muslims that Sveinung lacked. Resultantly, they often had a better understanding of themes that came up in the interviews and the research context. In turn, Sveinung was recognized as an expert in methodological design—the process of doing research and academic writing. Combined, this proved to be particularly fruitful during interviews and early analysis. Writing was more challenging, but it did produce a book of which almost every sentence was read, commented, and accepted by all the seven authors.

Collaborative research on Kejtsitani in Mexico

In Mexico, Lucero Ibarra Rojas simultaneously carried out a more radical project in terms of collaborative research, embedded within sociology of law. She cooperated closely with a diverse social movement collective, named Kejtsitani. The collective included indigenous peoples and mestizo scholars. They developed intellectual property guidelines, or suggestions for new law, from a communitarian perspective (Ibarra et al., 2020a). The initial aim and purpose of the research was not defined by the researcher, but instead by the needs of the Kejtsitani collective. This facilitated doing research in a very different way from that of the traditional scholars—that is, in the explicit interest of those being researched. Working together from the start, or handing over the initiative for research topics to actors in the field, meant fundamentally rethinking the relationship between the researcher and the surrounding society.

Kejtsitani is a collective concerned with oral history in the indigenous community of Cherán, and it is closely linked with the social mobilization and political project of this community as an indigenous autonomy (Ibarra et al., 2020a; Aragón, 2019). The initial aim of the collaboration was to create an intellectual property agreement with a public university.¹ With a background in law, Lucero’s involvement began as a legal counsellor to give the agreement an intercultural orientation. The agreement with the university became an opportunity to create a legal document from the perspective and within the law of the community. This aim also proved

¹ Further information on this project can be found in Kejtsitani’s website (Kejtsitani 2016).

fertile for discussions on intellectual property and research ethics. The legal advice work turned into a collaborative research on issues of research ethics and intellectual property (Ibarra et al., 2020a).

The community partners included scholars from outside the community, both senior and PhD students, and young people and scholars from the indigenous community. They were invited by Lucero to participate in a workshop to share what they had developed as intellectual property guidelines.² The draft and comments were further discussed in meetings with the participants of Kejtsitani, and the text was modified accordingly. The meetings had seven to ten members at a time. They drafted the text and discussed specific phrasings and the use of particular theories and concepts. These discussions later became data for the academic outputs of the project. The legal document drafted—the main aim and product of the collaboration—ended up not getting signed, but the project still has had some impact on the academic field (Ibarra et al., 2020a).

The methodology developed was later used in three other research projects: with a group developing a cultural centre (Ibarra et al., 2020c), with indigenous activist women (Ibarra et al. 2020b), and with activist lawyers (Bárcena et al., 2020). Although Lucero took the lead writing in some of these articles, particularly that on Kejtsitani, they consisted of more than her words and analysis. Transcripts of the discussions carried out with community partners were taken directly into the text, and not quoted as one would do in a traditional article based on a focus group study. The articles that were the outcome of these research projects were thus in many ways a condensed and focused transcription of group discussions. The participants expressed what they thought was inadequate—from big issues such as the role of researchers in the community to aspects such as the use of certain words in the text. Thus, the articles, their words and structure, were products of a negotiation and agreement between Lucero and the other actors involved in the research.

This radical form of cooperation was confirmed by the authorship, which in Kejtsitani's case included the social movement collective (Ibarra et al., 2020a). Two authors were recognized for having the main responsibility of the writing: Lucero who invited others to the collaboration and did most of the writing (or summing up of discussions), and her research assistant. The third author was the Kejtsitani collective, meaning that the social organization was recognized as an author. Including the collective as an author was a way to acknowledge the dialogue in the project as a process that turned into an article, and not seeing contributions as individual or isolated. The text was a result of the exchanges of ideas and agreements between the people involved in the research process. This included theoretical discussions. These could not just be added as a scholarly complement. Rather, the scholarly discussions were also part of the conversation, theories needed to be clear for everyone and there was a lot of discussion on whether they were pertinent or not to each article. The

² The workshop *The policy of cultural rights: socio-legal perspectives on cultural diversity* was held at the International Institute for the Sociology of Law (IISL) in July 2017, chaired by Lucero Ibarra Rojas and Miren Manias-Muñoz.

concept of team writing captures this process well and including the collective as an author was a way to acknowledge the contribution of everyone in the project.

Many of the authors found the process time-consuming and challenging to find a middle ground between the interests of the actors' social context in which the text was written and the coherence and consistency of academic publishing and writing. Another problem of including a community partner or social movement collective—or any other group—in team writing is assuming that they speak with one voice. This becomes particularly problematic when the group as a collective is included as a co-author, and not as individual members of the group. Including community partners in team writing and co-authorship can also risk them being reduced to mere tokens to gain legitimacy for the research, without any actual impact. In this project, for example, the responsibility to incorporate the discussions into the text was in the hands of Lucero who also initiated the collaboration. This way, she had more power than the others involved in the collaboration. However, participants, partly motivated by being recognized as authors, were far from passive or accommodating. They asserted their point of view throughout and added their knowledge to the analytical process.

The article with indigenous activist women may be particularly relevant to criminologists (Ibarra et al., 2020b). This project began with Lucero's interest in the way women in the Cherán community mobilized to demand justice in a case of femicide. She invited three women that she knew from Kejtsitani to write this article with her. They organized a mobilization that had gone unnoticed outside the community. Several scholars held the belief that the community did not care about the femicide, but this turned out not to be the case. They were deeply concerned about femicide, but also over the political implications of their mobilization for the autonomy project of the community. They were also interested in the article itself as a way to further highlight the many roles of women in the community. In their reflections, which were part of the research process, they built a link between autonomy and security, as well as political participation in a broad sense. Their political stance also included questioning the portrayal of their actions as feminism. As the article states, the four women had diverging experiences with feminism.³ As a result, the article was not presented within a feminist framework, because Lucero was the only author that identified herself as feminist.

Including community partners or social movement collectives in research means relinquishing control, but it can also bring forward arguments and perspectives that the researcher had not envisioned. Furthermore, it can prevent scholars from portraying the experiences of certain groups in categories and arguments that alienate or do not make sense to them. Including community partners can also increase the relevance of the questions posed by the scholar. In the Kejtsitani project, for example, it did redirect a good part of the final research outcome to a discussion of the role of law in ethnically and culturally diverse societies.

³ Interestingly, this discussion was brought forward during the Seminar on Dialogue of Knowledges and Militant Legal Practices by another indigenous woman.

What have we learned?

The academic field continues to remain mainly closed for people who are not scholars (Bourdieu, 2008), and there is arguably an extractivist element in the way researchers use people's lives and narratives (Alonso et al., 2018; Sinha & Back, 2014). This well-known critique should invite reflection over alternative methods to do and write up research in criminology.

Team research

Doing team research—irrespective of whether it is collaboration with other researchers or with research participants, stakeholders, and community partners (and these categories are not mutually exclusive)—is not easy. Its productivity and efficiency depend on the research aims, available data, and quality and interest of possible collaborators. Most importantly, team research demands more resources (often research funding) and more organizing (holding the group together). Potential conflicts can appear in research groups when trying to combine many different perspectives and approaches. 'Too many cooks spoil the broth' can be true for team research. It can be difficult to get the necessary consistency and focus if too many actors are involved.

Despite these potential difficulties, we believe that team research has great advantages. The most important pros of team research include the prospects of enhancing data collection, combating the emotional fatigue of researchers, and providing multiple voices and perspectives in data collection and analysis (Copes & Vieraitis, 2020; Zutshi et al., 2012). By including stakeholders and community partners, team research can also be a source of empowerment and ownership for those being studied. Sinha and Back (2014: 482) characterize their work as 'travelling alongside in dialogue'. Working alongside social actors in a field can change the research questions, aims, and assumptions behind them even after the research has begun.

Moreover, researchers often already do research 'together' with participants. By using interview data, for example, researchers rely on participants' interpretations and observations of the social world staged in these interactions. We believe this should be acknowledged in more than a few sentences in the method sections of publications, for example, by including stakeholders and community partners from the onset of research and involving them in decisions about research outcomes. The latter might change the final outcomes from being mainly academic articles and books to legal documents that the communities concerned can use in their struggles (as in the Kejtsitani-case), or videos or other popular culture products with the aim of reaching audiences beyond academia (as in the case of the study of young Muslims).

Collaboration with actors in the field can ease access, and in some cases, can even be the only way to get access to a particular community. The San People's Code of Research Ethics (South African San Institute, 2017) requires researchers to share the benefits of their research, including having San people work as translators and research assistants. This gives the San people jobs and opportunities to learn research skills. The research collaboration we suggest goes further, and has the aim

of increasing insights, and producing better and more socially responsible research. We believe that team research and writing with participants, stakeholders, and community partners can help ‘think outside the box’. Challenging the ways of the lone hero researcher, this kind of research is about opening up to inputs that come from frontiers that are not strictly academic. It should be accompanied by researchers’ reflections on themselves; their position as a scholar; and their positionality in relation to race, class, and gender (Kara, 2017; Sinha & Back, 2014).

We believe that team research is essential to further the democratization of academia. Doing this kind of research requires that scholars relinquish some of their control. As some de-colonial research suggests, collaborative research requires allowing for mutual learning wherein the researcher situates themselves as the person who needs to learn (Leyva et al., 2018). Researchers approach the research with a pre-established set of assumptions. Letting others change research questions or aims, or question interpretations of results, can often be hard and feel like a distraction more than enrichment. Such resistance from the field, however, is sound—and although sometimes bothersome—advances research. In our experience, the research meetings where we discussed potential interpretations and early analysis were particularly helpful. Such collaboration made the research outcomes stronger, more perceptive, and more nuanced. It also better represented the concerns of the groups studied, as compared to other studies in which we have been involved.

Team writing

When team research with assistants, actors in social fields, or both, involves close collaboration in all parts of the research process from designing methods to formulating research questions and deciding research outputs, this should also be reflected in authorship. Team writing and co-authoring can take many forms. For example, Dickens and Sagaria (1997) describe women’s co-authoring as motivated by nurturance, pragmatism, shared agenda, and intellectual and emotional closeness. Day and Eodice (2001: 184) have also written about the advantages of co-authorship among scholars in academia. With a ‘feminine sensibility’, they argue, it can lead to ‘exponential growth in the capacity to care’ and ‘transform academia into a place that nurtures intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally’ (see also Nathan et al., 1998). Even with a less optimistic approach, it is easy to list the potential advantages of team writing: mutual inspiration and motivation, covering fields outside the individual author’s expertise, challenging individual biases, etc. In most areas of professional life, collective writing of texts is the rule and cooperation is seen as an advantage—if not a necessary criterion—to get good results. This is also the case in many other sciences. It is maybe the humanities and social sciences that is the outlier in this regard—celebrating the lone hero author.

Many problems can arise when writing with academic colleagues. Lunsford and Ede (1994) identify eight factors that determine the satisfaction of co-authors: shared and articulated goals, openness and mutual respect, control over the text, being able to respond to modifications on the text by others, getting credit, an agreed procedure to resolve disputes, bureaucratic constraints, and how the project is valued by an

organization. Problems that might arise are unproductive consensuses, exploitation based on power imbalance (e.g. senior researchers taking advantage of juniors), and the problem of ‘inefficiency’ when authors pull the text and argument in different directions (Day & Eodice, 2001: 34, 136–140; Nathan et al., 1998). Such concerns also extend to writing with stakeholders and community partners. Power imbalance and inefficiency stand out as particularly problematic in team writing academic texts with people from outside academia. In addition, researchers more often than stakeholders and community partners are paid and promoted for the published texts.

Team writing can be time consuming, especially when authors have different ideas, writing styles, and agendas. It can also be difficult to find the form or voice of a text when writing together with others. This paper, for example, involves trying to combine a Latin-American/Spanish academic culture and writing style with a more Anglo-Saxon one, and involves two authors trying to find some common ground in a language foreign to both. The dialogic character of all text (Bakhtin, 1984; Frank, 2012) will probably increase as the differences in academic training, societal contexts, and language increase. More practical problems involve synthesizing personal styles and different ideas, and deciding on who does what. However, the sometimes tiresome and complicated process of going back and forth with ideas often leads to better and more thought-through interpretations and analysis. The final text, in our experience, is usually better, as it has been thoroughly discussed and scrutinized. Moreover, when dealing with sensitive issues, the participation of the people at stake will give researchers the confidence that the final text has considerably addressed these issues.

Our most concrete advice for people who wish to be involved in collaborative research is to consider involving the participants in thinking over the text and centralize the writing process. In our projects, the project leaders often ended up with the job of bringing collective concerns to the text. Collaborators outside of academia can be inexperienced and may struggle with writing, but still be very active in developing interpretations, providing necessary contextual information, or assisting the analytical framework. In these cases, they are essential to the ideas that are present in the research design and final text. Participants in team writing can also contribute to the writing process, but the research team will still need a ‘final pen’ to secure the coherence of the text. In a diverse group of researchers, this division of labour recognizes the experience of the researcher as an academic writer. Being the main author is a role that comes with a lot of responsibility as much defining power is centralized in the writing process.

Conclusion

Team research and writing with research participants, stakeholders, and community partners increases plurality and democracy in academia and answers some of the critique of power imbalances in contemporary academic research. These practices are a highly concrete way to address some of the issues of positionality and ownership to research which are widely debated within contemporary qualitative research. Strangely, adhering to general critical perspectives is often more common among

qualitative researchers in criminology than engaging in methodological and writing practices that can challenge the status quo. Doing team research and writing in criminology can be a way to practise what is preached. It can empower those being researched and give way to other voices in academia. In some cases, it is also only fair in terms of contribution to research.

We have argued in favour of team research and writing as a way in which researchers can challenge the notion of the lone hero researcher. We believe that the production of knowledge should be seen as a collective endeavour—cumulative and often done in groups, networks, and societal contexts that facilitate it. We have argued in favour of all forms of team research and writing—for example, with other scholars or students which are not particularly controversial—but especially for a more radical approach of including people who are part of or have stakes in the research field. All forms of team research and writing are time-consuming. Researchers must give up the rewarding and somehow mythic social role of the lone hero researcher. It can also damage careers as co-authorship is interpreted as a lack of individual skills or independence in certain academic milieus, and collaboration with stakeholders and community partners is sometimes seen as a challenge to the ideals of academic objectivity and neutrality. We still believe that qualitative criminologists should experiment more with these practices.

We admit that the problems arising from team research and writing are complicated. Individuals or groups should not become mere tokens in cosmetic attempts of representation and researchers should not be reduced to mere representatives of the groups they study. It can also be difficult to distinguish between researchers, stakeholders and community members, and any one author one can easily be all these things at the same time (Christie, 1997; Sollund, 2017) or move between different roles in different situations or throughout the career. We have therefore been reluctant to draw clear distinctions between these positions in this paper. What we believe can be fruitful are real, long-lasting research collaborations, with people that for a variety of reasons may have something invested in the fields under study. We suggest that this should also be reflected in co-authorship in some cases. There are good reasons to challenge, question, or at least discuss, the role of the author, or the author-function (Foucault, 1998) in contemporary qualitative research.

Our experiences with team research and writing have been encouraging. We felt that it made the research more multifaceted, reflexive and, thus, better. We have been mostly conducting traditional qualitative research and may continue to do so in the future. However, separating ourselves from the ideal of the lone hero, and expanding on who to write and do research with, allowed for a scholarly experience of dialogue that challenged assumptions, blind spots and made the research stronger. Working with a multitude of researchers from various backgrounds, and even the experience of writing this article together, has shown us that diversity – whether it is in life experience, ethnicity, geographical origin, gender or other – has a lot to offer academic scholarship.

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Declarations

Competing interests The authors declare that there are no conflict of interest.

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